Hunting Locations—By JOHN B. WALLACE

IN THESE days of house scarcity in the larger cities, the man who is compelled to move is considerably out of luck. House hunting is an occupation that is apt to send chills of terror up and down the spine of the average citizen. Friend wife usually seems to enjoy it for a day or two but it soon palls even on her. What do you think then of a man who daily starts out on a search for not one house but sometimes half a dozen? And each one of these houses must come up to certain specifications. Yet he starts out most cheerfully, actually seeming to enjoy his task.

Such a man is Walter C. Reed, a location director for the largest studio at Hollywood, California. Of course he does not desire to live in these residences; merely to have pictures taken of them. But often it would be easier for him to dispossess the family and rent the premises outright than to obtain the privilege of placing a swarm of motion picture actors and actresses on the porches and lawns.

Mr. Reed, as have so many of our motion picture people, started his career on the stage. He was a comedian specializing in Irish characterizations. With Roscoe Arbuckle, who has since won fame as a motion picture star, he toured the country in musical comedy and vaudeville. Motion pictures attracted the pair and they signed up with a producer of comedies.

Those were the days of slapstick comedy in the pictures. Everybody likes to laugh at a fat man and Arbuckle because of his immense bulk and remarkable agility was what is known in theatrical parlance as "a scream." But the more delicate humor of his partner, the Irish comedian, Reed, failed to get over with the picture fans as it had on the speaking stage. No one realized this more quickly than Reed. He saw that if he wished to become a success in the pictures he would be compelled to try the game from another angle.

He studied directing, becoming co-director with Arbuckle in many of his pictures and occasionally taking a character bit himself. He specialized on stunt work and delighted in framing up trick pictures. Reed's opportunity that eventually landed him in his present position, came through Houdini. This famous illusionist and stage magician had done some work in the pictures and was under contract with the corporation with which Reed is now connected, to film a picture in which there were several under-water scenes. His director, a capable man, had had no experience in this line of work and Houdini was in a quandary until he heard of Reed. The latter's reputation for stunt stuff had spread among the studios and after a conference with the former Irish comedian the magician engaged him as his director. Previously to working with Reed, the handcuff king had risked his life in some of his death-defying feats but the new director soon showed him how to take the peril out of picture stunts. The result was one of the most remarkable pictures that has ever been filmed which, although it proved to be a financial failure, firmly established Reed's reputation as a stunt director. So cleverly had he done his work that several photographers thought he had infringed on some of their under-water photography patents until he convinced them that it was the director and not the camera that had produced certain effects.

When Reed was engaged as location director his employers found that they had obtained a man who not only could discover locations but could fix them over to fit the needs of the story. In other words a location man was no longer a mere clerk to be given a blank check and sent out to hire a location but an expert in photography, acting and detail who ranked as a director.

With the inception of a new picture Reed is called into consultation with the director of the company that is to perform in it. The scenario is read scene by scene and Reed, notebook in hand, takes the description of the locations desired. He then seizes his camera and climbing into his automobile, sets out on his search. This is not the aimless trip, however, that the reader might imagine.

Before leaving the studio Reed has carefully gone over his files and it is seldom that he departs without having a pretty clear idea of just what he wants and just about where he will find it.

These files, the result of months of patient research, contain photographs and descriptions of every imaginable site for a picture location. Reed never leaves the studio without his camera and notebook and even on those rare occasions when he is driving simply for pleasure he will stop and snap an unusual house, building or bit of scenery that his instinct tells him may some day be desirable for a scene in a picture. He has a remarkable memory and often when a director is reading a script he will mentally place every scene in the story. Sometimes he will interrupt the reading and describe a certain location.

"That is just what I want," the director will tell him. "Nail it."

Sometimes he will find a location that is so ideal for the purposes of the story that the director will change the entire action to fit the location. It is seldom indeed that a location is found that does not need some changes. Here is where Reed's experience in camouflage comes in handy.

Suppose, for instance, that he is hunting for a certain style house, perhaps colonial, perhaps an English manor that has a brick wall about it. He may find a house that fits the action exactly but it has no brick wall or maybe it has a wall but it is so high that the camera will not photograph over it. It is then up to the technical director to build a wall or take enough bricks off the one already there so that the camera will shoot over the top. Sometimes it is necessary to build another story on the house, to add porches, or construct an entire wing.

Whenever Reed finds a place where extensive alterations are necessary the cost is computed and it is often found to be cheaper to build the set at the studio. This question of expense is always taken into consideration by Reed and he is many times able to save his employers thousands of dollars by clever devices that give the desired effect with a minimum of cost.

WALTER C. REED

Reed's greatest bugbear in Southern California is the tropical and semi-tropical trees and foliage. Palms and orange groves do not fit in with New England and Canadian scenes. Often he will find the perfect type of location for which he is searching only to have it spoiled by a group of palms or an orange or lemon grove in the offing.

Scenes in which the actors are seen disporting themselves on the roofs of high office buildings, climbing hand over hand over telephone wires or tumbling down fire escapes are not nearly as perilous as would appear to the spectator who views the picture on the screen.

False ledges are built and the camera set so that they do not appear in the picture. Thus while the picture shows nothing between the actor and the street hundreds of feet below, in reality should the actor slip he would fall only a few feet. It is part of Reed's job to find buildings that would be suitable for such scenes and after he has found them to make arrangements with the owners for their use.

And it is there that the location director's hardest task confronts him. In a certain comedy picture that is now being shown on the screen Mr. Reed learned that a building would be required that had several offsets and must be at least eight stories in height. A scene in the picture was to show the principal character hanging out of a window with but a precarious hold on the sill. Obviously it would not do to allow a high priced star to run the risk of falling eight stories to the street below. Also a place had to be provided for the camera man. Finally after some search Mr. Reed found just what the director wanted. The building belonged to a large corporation and when Reed approached the manager with his request the latter would not even listen to him.

"It is impossible," he was told.

But it is for overcoming just such difficulties that Reed draws his big salary. He proceeded to point out to the corporation head the large amount of business that the corporation yearly transacted because of the existence of the film industry and the economic advantages that the community and city derived from the film colony. He also showed him how the picture could be taken on Saturday afternoon and Sunday and would not therefore disturb any of the tenants. Before he had finished he had won his point.

Mr. Reed has been compelled to forego using some wonderful locations because he could find absolutely no way to persuade the owners to allow him to use their residences. On the other hand, the studio daily receives letters from persons anxious to rent their houses for pictures. Rentals run all the way from $10 to $250 a day, depending upon how badly the director desires a location and also how much inconvenience an owner may be put to while the picture is being taken.

It is never advisable for Reed to allow an owner to know just how badly a location is needed, as often an owner will increase the price if he has reason to believe the location is indispensable.

Reed told me of a certain picture where it was desired to have several scenes in a haunted house. The moment the director read the scene in the script, Reed thought of a house he had snapped a year before while passing by on other business. He found the address in his files and drove to it. Much to his disappointment he discovered that the old house which stood on a hill and was surrounded by ghostly poplar trees had recently changed hands and the new owner had a force of carpenters on the ground engaged in renovating it. With some difficulty Reed persuaded him to forego his improvements for the present and he put the carpenters to work making the place even more ghostlike.

Reed finds that it pays to tell the truth. In fact he usually overstates the case when renting a location.

"If it is a lawn scene and we intend putting on fifty children," he explained, "I will tell them that there may be a hundred. If the owner finds less than he was led to expect he is naturally pleased and will be all the more approachable the next time we might desire to rent his place."

Reed does not intend always to be a location director. He is planning some day to go into the pictures again as an actor. But he will not have made the mistake of other stage favorites who tried to break into the game without learning the rules.

The Wood Hollow Papers

By ROBERT PAGE LINCOLN

WHERE you find the hairy woodpecker there also will you find his very near relative, the downy woodpecker. He partakes of a coloration much like that of the hairy woodpecker, but may be properly distinguished by the spot of red upon his head. There is one scraggly old tree across the way on which a pair of downies have been at work now for well nigh a month. Very early in the morning they are there and at it, beginning at the roots and working up and around it, then flying away, only to return again and again, pecking so that the bark flies. Before winter is over the insect life, dormant and in the egg, will there be at a low margin. Dead trees are a menace to any wood, for they are literally one mass of eggs of insects of all varieties; a veritable depository of parasitical life. I have no doubt but that these winter birds work over these dead trees every day in the winter and that few insects and borers are left. All dead trees should be chopped down and cut up into stove-wood.

A pleasant little fellow is the downy woodpecker. You pause to watch one at work on a tree and ere you know it he has circled around to the other side of the tree out of your eyesight. You crack a stick and at once his head is thrust out at the side to see what is up; then he retreats, only to bob out at the other side to give you a questioning survey. If you should move around so as to get a glimpse of him on the side where he is working you will find that he has skillfully circled around to the other side as though fully aware of your actions. Yet no matter how he circles you can always expect to see his head bob out to get a glimpse of you, as though uncertain if he shall place you in the enemy or the well-wisher tribe.

The life of the birds is one of incessant consuming of food. Their appetite is never blunted; indigestion is certainly foreign to their indomitable constitutions. This is probably due to the fact that they do not drink coffee or smoke cigars and pipes. On insect fare they gorge themselves all day long and still are apparently ready for more. Our dank though worthy friend the toad will, in the summer, fill himself full to the brim as many as six times in a night with cutworms, slugs and various grubs—an astonishing exhibition, but this gastronomical feat of the toad is as nothing when we compare it with the birds. The voraciousness of young birds is a marvel and whoever has watched this feeding process can more fully understand the value of the birds than the superficial scholar who reckons the value of the birds in a sentimental measure forgetting the standing practical value. Beautiful as are the birds, arousing in us the most noble thoughts, there is also the material side to be considered and that is replete with facts that quell all doubts. *To say that our food supply depends upon the bird population is certainly to say the very least!*

On the coldest day (should it be twenty-four below zero) you will find the nuthatch as ever at his task of running up and down the tree trunks in quest of insect fare. The claws on his toes are made in such manner that they dig into the bark with the result that he may keep himself erect on the tree bracing himself on his stiff, feathered tail. The nuthatch is a clean-made bird, well-formed and rigid, with a slender bill with which to pry out the recalcitrant. With what deliberation this is done one will know who observes him busy at his wintry tasks. Witness how steadily hole after hole is dug and one moth egg after another is routed out; or ant upon ant is noted at the end of the bill ere they go the way of the forefathers. How many thousands are unearthed and digested throughout the day I do not know but it surely must make up a handsome figure. Most noticeable of all is the perfect freedom with which this bird runs down a tree trunk, with head thrust out to watch you. The feathers of the nuthatch lie well compressed to the body, thus providing a coat through which the winds cannot penetrate. The upperparts are slate-colored, with the underparts whitish; the wings are noticeably darker than the back, touched up with white and black. The cheeks and the underside of the neck are whitish. The top of the head and the back of the neck are darkish.

Few are aware of why the nuthatch is so named. It is not only a feeder upon insects but also adds nuts and seeds to its bill of fare. These it will ingeniously lodge in a crack or crevice and will then peck them open with the bill. The nuthatch is a singularly friendly bird and if you practice comradeship and cooperation by installing feed boxes on the grounds and attach suet at convenient places you will find the nuthatch there to give them his attention and at the same time extend to you every morning a merry "how-do-you-do." The chickadee is by far the most friendly of the winter birds and a little courting of his good will and he will, sooner or later, drop down from a limb to take a seat on your finger, pecking at the suet.

No day is bleak that has a nuthatch active in it. He is reckless of the uncompromising cold. In fact the colder the day the more it appears to his liking. He is a trim, gallant Galahad; riding upon the waves of the wintry storm and laughing his, *"Quank! yank! yank!"* into the teeth of the gale.

Familiar as is the sight of the nuthatch in the wintertime, it is rare that one sees them in the summer. During the nesting season they are seclusion-loving; they retire from the sight of men. But in the autumn (and with the coming of the first snows) they are a-wing. It is then they are in their element, speeding in their dipping flight from tree to tree on their mission of good to man.

(Continued next week)